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I. SUMMARY

A total of 9,731 calves were certified and 5,544 were sold through 11 monitored sales in 10 locations in 1983. This represents a significant decline in the numbers certified sold compared to 1982. The number of producers using the program declined from 256 in 1982 to 125 in 1983.

Price comparisons were done at 8 sales which included 4,596 head of preconditioned calves or 94% of the preconditioned calves sold in 1983. The price premiums were $4.50/cwt for steers and $2.43 for heifers. Price data on preimmunized calves was insufficient to make comparisons.

A total of 46 certified calf producers completed cost surveys on 3,567 calves or 37% of the calves certified in 1983. Per- cent of calves treated and per cent death losses were low at 3.5% and 0.53% respectively. Average total costs were $33.65 /head. Feed costs were the largest single cost at $30.03/head. Veterinarian and animal health product costs were $1.62/head and $2.00/head respectively.

Demonstrational trials conducted in 1983 and earlier years indicate that preconditioned calves can gain faster than those left out with the cows. Under typical conditions, preconditioned calves can be expected to gain 20 to 40 pounds more than those not weaned. Average costs of preconditioning of $33.65 per head were reported in 1983.

A total of 37 feeders returned health performance data of 3,147 certified calves or 57% of the certified calves sold in 1983. Overall health performance, as measured by treatment rate, death loss, and feed adaption was considerably better for certified calves than for regular calves. In both Ontario and Alberta treatment rate of preconditioned calves was one-third that of regular calves.

II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Preconditioning can be defined as a program to minimize the economic loss caused by stress and disease during the movement of calves from the cow herd to the feedlot. Calves which are weaned, started on feed and vaccinated by the producer, should be better prepared to withstand this stress.

The practice of preconditioning began in Iowa in the late 1960's. Dr. John Herrick, and the Iowa Veterinary Medical Association were largely responsible for it's development and success. By 1969, the first year of the state-wide program 61,000 calves were preconditioned. The program is now under the direction of the Iowa Veterinary Medical Association and the Iowa Cattlemens Association. In 1981, 600,000 calves were preconditioned. With a cow herd of 1.8 million head this represents a significant portion of the calves, raised in Iowa, being preconditioned.

The Alberta Certified Preconditioned Feeder (ACPF) Program has operated as a pilot project of Alberta Agriculture. The program developed from meetings held in the County of Ponoka during the spring of 1980. Representatives of the cattle industry and Alberta Agriculture drafted the initial guidelines for the program. Further meetings were held with calf producers in the Ponoka area to explain the guidelines and discuss the concept. A group of interested producers formed a local society and held their first sale November 8, 1980. The program expanded to the Fort MacLeod, Rocky Mountain House and Grande Prairie areas in 1981 and to Didsbury, Olds, Fariview, Edmonton and Wainwright in 1982.

Preconditioning is not new to many Alberta producers. The requirements associated with preconditioning are sound management practices which were used by many producers prior to establishment of the ACPF program. Prior to the start of the ACPF program organized sales of preconditioned calves had been tried at various locations in Alberta with little success. Since cattle feeders were apparently unwilling to pay a premium for calves that did not carry a guarantee of the procedures which had been done, and the lack of a uniform program and promotion of the concept contributed to the lack of success and acceptance.

III. ACPF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The ACPF Program includes two options to accomodate a greater number of calf producers. These options are: preconditioned and preimmunized. The requirements for each of the options are listed below. Other vaccinations, management practices and information of the feeding program and breeding background can be recorded on the certificates.

Preconditioned Option:

Calves must be:

1. At least 4 months of age prior to being vaccinated.
2. Owned by the operator 60 days prior to sale or shipment.
3. Castrated and dehorned at least 3 weeks prior to sale or shipment.

4. Vaccinated with IBR - PI_3 and multi-Clostridial (7 way) vaccine 3 weeks prior to sale or shipment.
5. Treated for warble grubs at least 3 weeks prior to sale or shipment.
6. Accompanied by an official ACPF certificate completed and signed by both a veterinarian and the producer.
7. Calves must be weaned from the cow at least 30 days prior to sale or shipment.
8. Tagged with an official ACPF green tag applied under the supervision of a licenced veterinarian.

Preimmunized Option

The preimmunized option has the same requirements for the preconditioned option excepting calves need not be weaned. Preimmunized calves are tagged with official ACPF white tags.

IV. ACPF PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS

The Preventive Medicine Branch, Animal Health Division, Alberta Agriculture is responsible for the administration of the program. Eartags and certificates are issued to practicing veterinarians by the Branch. Several District Agriculture offices are designated as depots for tags and certificates. This allows for faster distribution of the materials and local co-ordination of the program by those involved. Upon completion of the certificate, one copy is returned to the Branch where it is retained on file.

The certificates and the tags were provided at no charge from 1980 to 1983. In addition one visit by a veterinarian to each participating herd was provided by Alberta Agriculture in 1980 and 1981. A limit of two paid visits per herd was applied in 1982.

In 1981, an Advisory Committee was established by Ministerial Order to provide guidance and authority in the operation of the program. Representation on the committee consists of 3 cattle producers, 3 representatives of Alberta Agriculture, and one each from the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association, and the Alberta Auction Market Association. Each year at the annual meeting Advisory Committee representatives have the opportunity to propose and discuss changes to the program. Program requirements and operating guidelines are recommended to the Minister of Agriculture by the Committee.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF 1983 ACPF PROGRAM

ACPF Program Requirements and Administration Changes

Two changes in the program were suggested and implemented in 1983. The minimum requirement for the clostridial vaccine was changed from 8-way to 7-way. The committee also suggested that Alberta Agriculture continue to supply certificates and tags at no cost but discontinue the paid veterinary visit. This decision was made on the basis that the paid veterinary visit was initiated only as incentive to get the program going, and not meant to be a continuing subsidy to the program.

In addition, restrictions in funding only allowed for continuation of either the visit or the supply of tags and certificates. The Ministerial Committee felt that present funding should be applied to supplying the ACPF eartags and certificates.

Alberta Agriculture Staff Support of ACPF

In September 1982, Dwight Karren was seconded from the Animal Industry Division to co-ordinate the ACPF program. In this position he assisted in the administration of the program, conducted research trials on calf performance, extended information on the program to Alberta Agriculture staff, veterinarians, auction market operators, cattle feeders and cattle producers and prepared the annual reports, factsheets, slide sets and related materials. As of March 31, 1984 this position will revert back to its former status. Copies of factsheets dealing with the requirements for (Agdex 420/662-5) and economics of (Agdex 420/662-4) preconditioning are available from District Agriculture offices or Print Media Branch, Alberta Agriculture, Edmonton.

At the various sale locations District Agriculturists provided assistance to producers, auction market personnel and the ACPF Co-ordinator in helping to extend the program to local producers, conducting on farm preconditioning trials, tag and certificate distribution, producer survey distribution, organization of the sales, preparing the sales catalog, distribution of certificates and feeder surveys to purchasers and obtaining the sale price data. A survey of District Agriculturists conducted in 1983 suggested that they wanted to continue to be involved with servicing the program.

Rick Williams, District Agriculturist at Ponoka chaired the Advertising Committee which consisted of several District Agriculturists. This committee organized and co-ordinated national advertising of the ACPF sales. Their major thrust was a brochure outlining the program and sale dates and locations. This was included as an insert in the October, 1983 issue of the Cattlemen magazine which had a national distribution of 47,000. Funding for this brochure was provided by a $3,660 grant from the Market Development Branch of Alberta Agriculture.

ACPF Program Participation

The program experienced a decline in 1983 after three previous years of growth. A total of 9,731 calves were certifed and 5,544 were sold through 11 monitored sales in 10 locations in 1983 (Table 1). This was a 40.1% decline in the number certified and 32.0% deline in the number sold compared to 1982. The largest decline occurred among preimmunized calves where there was a 71.7% decrease in calves certified. The total number of producers involved in the program decreased from 256 to 125 in 1983. The largest decline occurred among producers of preimmunized calves which decreased by 75.9% from 58 to 14 producers. Producers of preconditioned calves decreased from 198 to 111 (43.9%).

Although several reasons have been suggested for the decline in numbers in 1983, none of them could be measured objectively. One major reason for the reduced numbers was the decision to remove the paid veterinary visit from the program. The previous decision to limit the number of paid visits at other ACPF sales to a total of two had little, if any, effect on numbers sold in those locations. It would appear however, that the decision to end paid visits had a marked effect in the

TABLE 1: Number of ACPF Calves Certified and Sold From 1980 - 1983

			PRECONDITIONED		PREIMMUNIZED		TOTAL	
YEAR	LOCATIONS	SALES	CERTIFIED*	SOLD	CERTIFIED	SOLD	CERTIFIED	SOLD
1980	1	1	867 (6)	900	537 (9)	400	1404 (15)	1300
1981	4	7	5317 (92)	4014	1796 (27)	1081	7113 (119)	5095
1982	9	14	11594 (198)	6339	4662 (58)	1815	16256 (256)	8154
1983	10	11	8410 (111)	4879	1321 (14)	665	9731 (125)	5544

* values in brackets are number of producers.

Olds-Didsbury and Edmonton-Clyde areas where the program had only been in operation for one year.

Two other measures of the effect of removing the paid veterinary visit are the increased number of pseudo-preconditioned calves offered for sale in 1983 and the decrease in the number of calves preimmunized. Pseudo-preconditioned calves are calves offered for sale as preconditioned but not tagged or certified by a veterinarian. In many cases, the program followed by the producers was similar or identical to the ACPF program but without veterinary supervision or certificates. There is little doubt that the increase in the number of these calves was directly related to the decision to remove the paid veterinary visit. The large reduction in the numbers of preimmunized calves is also, in part, directly related to the removal of the paid visit. Since producers who chose the preimmunized option of the program often had less commitment to sell their calves, many producers enrolled who were undecided about selling or who had no intention of selling but wanted to take advantage of free veterinary service and ear tags. The data in Table 1 suggests that many of these producers did not enroll in 1983.

Table 2 provides a more detailed listing, by location, of ACPF sales in 1983. New sales were scheduled at Stettler, Clyde and Rimbey, but experienced difficulty attracting sufficient calves to make a good sale. Sales initially planned at Didsbury and Wainwright were not held because of insufficient listings. Fairview did not schedule a sale in 1983 because of insufficient producer interest.

In 1983, as in previous years, calves from British Columbia and Saskatchewan were sold at ACPF sales in Alberta. In 1983, preconditioning programs similar to the Alberta program were started in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Sales were held at Kamloops and Saskatoon.

TABLE 2: Numbers of Certified Calves Sold at Various Locations in 1983

LOCATION	DATE	PREIMMUNIZED	PRECONDITIONED
Fort MacLeod	Oct. 13	230	-
Ponoka	Nov. 3	200	-
High River	Nov. 7	150	-
Fort MacLeod	Nov. 17	-	398
Stettler	Nov. 25	70	80
Clyde	Nov. 26	15	452
Fort MacLeod	Dec. 1	-	734
Rimbey	Dec. 1	-	203
Rocky Mtn. House	Dec. 2	-	304
Ponoka	Dec. 3	-	993
Grande Prairie	Dec. 5	-	1141
Red Deer	Dec. 5	-	360
Edmonton	Dec. 9	N/A	214
TOTAL	—	665	4879

ACPF Related Research Trials

In spite of 15 years of experience with the preconditioning concept in North America, little factual information on the costs and benefits of preconditioning is available. One of the objectives of the ACPF Committee was to initiate research trials that would increase the knowledge of the effects of preconditioning in beef cow herds. A number of projects were started in 1982 to provide this information.

Performance of Preconditioned Calves on Ranches

Two calf producers with crossbred cow herds agreed to participate in this trial. One producer was located in the heavier rainfall, foothills area of west central Alberta, while the other was located in the short grass area of east central Alberta. The project was designed to measure the effects of preconditioning on both calves and cows over two production cycles.

Each producer allotted 100 cows to the trial in 1982 and 150 in 1983. One-half the cows in each herd were randomly allocated to the preconditioned treatment following the ACPF requirements. The remaining group of cows were treated and handled in the operator's usual management routine. When the preconditioned calves were weaned, all cows and calves were individually weighed. They were reweighed at the end of the preconditioning period. In 1983, one-half the preconditioned calves were weaned for 30 days while the other half were weaned for 42 days.

Information was recorded on cow weight changes, calf weight changes and feed consumed by the weaned calves over the preconditioning period. Data was recorded on calving dates, number of cows calving and reasons for cow removals from the herd. The trial will conclude following calving in 1984.

Performance of Preconditioned Calves in the Feedlot

A co-operating cattle feeder purchased 100 preconditioned and 100 regular calves from the two co-operating calf producers in the previous trial. All calves in both groups were individually weighed at the farm of origin, upon arrival at the feedlot and 100 days after entering the

feedlot. Preconditioned and regular calves were penned and fed separately and individual gains, health performance data and group feed consumptions was recorded. The trial will conclude in the 1983-84 feeding period.

On Farm Demonstrations of Preconditioning

A number of demonstration trials of preconditioning have been conducted at various locations since the beginning of the ACPF program. Trials which included both preconditioned and regular calves are summarized in Table 3. Data collected in these trials supports the conclusion that under typical Alberta conditions calves can gain faster in a preconditioning program than they could have if they had been left on the cow. The actual performance difference is dependent upon the breed, preconditioning ration and the fall pasture conditions. These factors must be taken into account when considering preconditioning as an option.

ACPF Sale Results

Price comparisons were done on 7 of the 11 sales held in 1983. These sales included 4,596 head of preconditioned calves or 94.2% of the preconditioned calves sold in 1983. A summary of the weighted average prices and the price differentials between ACPF calves and regular calves is provided in Table 4.

TABLE 3: Average Daily Gains of Preconditioned and Regular* Steer and Heifer Calves

YEAR	BREED	PRECONDITIONED No. Head	No. Days	Initial Wt. lbs.	ADG lbs.	REGULAR No. Head	No. Days	Initial Wt. lbs.	ADG lbs.	DIFFERENCE ADG lbs.
Southern Alberta										
1981	He	284	28	370	1.31	335	23	424	0.45	.86
1982	He	190	43	400	1.1	439	26	418	0.46	.64
West Central Alberta										
1981	He	360	33	450	2.02	125	30	450	1.00	1.02
1982	X Bred	49	52	526	2.21	49	52	540	2.02	0.19
1983	X Bred	70	63	515	2.55	81	63	519	2.02	0.53
East Central										
1982	He X	50	48	460	2.29	50	48	465	1.19	1.10
1983	He X	66	59	447	2.17	64	59	444	2.12	.05
North East										
1983	He X**	25	39	540	2.54	25	39	555	0.89	1.65

* on pasture with dams
** steers only

Price comparisons on preimmunized calves were not done because insufficient numbers were sold. The weighted average mean prices for various weight categories were obtained from the Canfax program operated at several auction markets in Alberta. Price differentials were determined for each weight category by calculating the difference between weighted average prices of ACPF calves and regular calves from comparison sales. Weighted prices were only calculated where 20 or more animals were sold in a weight category. Prices at sales, at the same location, the week prior to and the week after the ACPF sale were used as comparison sales. Sales at Fort MacLeod compared ACPF calves to regular calves sold at the same sale.

In 1982, the average price differential for 2,605 preconditioned steer calves was $4.50/cwt and for 1,574 preconditioned heifers $2.43/cwt. Price premiums received for ACPF steer calves in previous years are listed in Table 5.

TABLE 4: Summary of Prices and Differentials for ACPF Calves - 1983

LOCATION	DATE OF SALE	TOTAL NO.	STEERS			HEIFERS		
			NO. OF CALVES	PRICE AVE. $	PRICE DIFF. $	NO. OF CALVES	PRICE AVE. $	PRICE DIFF. $
Fort MacLeod	Nov. 17	398	204	88.35	+0.91	87	76.83	-1.35
Clyde	Nov. 26	452	269	87.67	+2.78	138	77.57	+0.65
Fort MacLeod	Dec. 1	734	398	91.70	+4.84	324	79.67	-2.44
Rocky Mtn. House	Dec. 2	304	160	91.33	+3.59	64	80.02	+2.26
Ponoka	Dec. 3	993	510	92.24	+5.36	465	81.59	+3.68
Grande Prairie	Dec. 5	1141	805	88.40	+6.14	336	79.76	+2.25
Red Deer	Dec. 5	360	144	90.06	+3.41	160	80.79	+2.79
Edmonton	Dec. 9	214	115	87.13	+1.05	-	-	-
Total of All Sales		4596	2605	89.79	+4.50	1574	80.04	+2.43

TABLE 5: ACPF Yearly Price Differentials For Preconditoned Calves (1980-1983)

YEAR	No. SALES	STEERS		HEIFERS	
		No. HEAD	PRICE DIFFERENTIAL $	No. HEAD	PRICE DIFFERENTIAL $
1980	1	495	5.66	223	4.04
1981	6	1518	4.04	1496	2.66
1982	7	2827	5.56	1683	5.74
1983	8	2605	4.50	1574	2.43
Average Price			4.94		3.72

Premiums for steer calves were lower by $1.06 per cwt from 1982 levels, while those received for heifers were down $3.31 per cwt. The decline in the premiums was probably largely due to the increase in average prices in 1983. Certified steer calves averaged $7.13 per cwt and heifers $7.76 per cwt more than in 1982. Apparently, there is buyer resistance to premiums when prices are higher.

ACPF Producer Survey

In 1983, for the first time since the program began, a survey of ACPF cow-calf producers was conducted. A questionaire along with a self addressed return envelope was given to all producers of ACPF calves. Most producers were also contacted by telephone. A total of 46 producers who hade certified a total of 3567 calves completed and returned the survey. This represented 36% of the producers and calves involved in the program in 1983. The results of the survey are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6: Results of ACPF Producer Survey - 1983

PRODUCTION DATA	AVERAGE
Average No. of Calves	77.5
Average Weights (lbs) - Steers	548
- Heifers	502
HEALTH DATA	
Calves Treated (%)	3.50
Deaths Loss (%)	0.53
COST DATA	
Feed ($/hd)	30.03
Veterinarian ($/hd)	1.62
Vaccine ($/hd)	2.00
TOTAL ($/hd)	33.65

The health problems encountered in certified calves during the weaning period were quite low. An observed treatment rate of 3.5% and death loss of 0.5% is low considering that regular calves in feedlots have average treatment rates of approximately 20% and death losses around 2%. At an average value of $425 per calf and a treatment cost of $10 per treatment, 3.5% treated and 0.5% deaths represents a disease cost of $0.35/hd and $2.25/hd respectively. The total average reported costs of preconditioning were $33.65 per head. Including the additional $0.35 and $2.25 per head treatment and deaths per costs, the entire cost of preconditioning was $36.25 per calf.

Data on the added returns from additional sale weights or price premiums received was insufficient to allow conclusions to be made about net returns and the economics of preconditioning. However, it could be calculated that with calf prices of $90/cwt either an additional 40 lbs. of calf sold or a price premium of approximately $7/cwt would have covered costs for calves weighing around 500 lbs. Realizing both would have resulted in a net return to preconditioning of approximately $36.00/ calf.

The cost of veterinary services reported in the survey did not support the idea that considerable savings could be made by producers if they preconditioned their own calves without having them officially certified. Veterinary costs averaged $1.62 per calf which would have been covered by a price premium of approximately $0.30/cwt. This is a negligible cost considering the added value associated with identification and certification that the required procedures were completed.

ACPF Feeder Survey

As in previous years health performance of certified calves was evaluated by conducting a survey of purchasers of ACPF certified calves. The survey asked feeders to compare certified calves with regular calves in their feedlots. Surveys forms were distributed either at the time of sale or were mailed to each purchaser after the sale. All purchasers were contacted by telephone 6 to 8 weeks later to remind them of the survey. Surveys were returned by mail in an addressed prepaid postage envelope. Thirty-two Alberta feeders and 5 Ontario feeders responded and provided information on 2,711 certifed and 2,775 regular calves in Alberta and 436 certified and 432 regular calves in Ontario. The number of certified calves on which information was obtained represented 56.8% of all the certified calves sold in 1983. The results of the survey are presented in Table 7.

Treatment rates of preconditioned and preimmunized calves were significantly reduced compared to regular calves in both Alberta and Ontario. Information on preimmunized calves was obtained only from Alberta feeders and they were not significantly different than preconditioned calves. Death loss data is difficult to interpret with such small numbers. Feeders appeared to have considerably fewer deaths with preconditioned calves. In Alberta preimmunized calves tended to be intermediate. Certified calves also appeared to adapt to feed with fewer problems than regular calves.

Table 8 compares the health performance of certified and regular calves by year. The data for 1983 follows the trend established in previous years. Preconditioned calves have better overall health performance than do regular calves while preimmunized calves were intermediate.

TABLE 7: Health Performance of All ACPF Calves Surveyed in 1983

Program Type	Number of Lots	Number of Animals	Percent Treated	Percent Died	Feed Adaptation[1]
ALBERTA					
Preconditioned	26	2,033	10.4[a]	0.5[a]	1.35
Preimmunized	6	678	12.9[a]	1.5[a,b]	1.40
Regular	13	2,775	29.9[b]	2.8[b]	2.00
Significance[2]			**	P=0.09	
ONTARIO					
Preconditioned	5	436	8.5	0.0	1.0
Regular	4	432	25.7	0.9	1.5
Significance[2]			**	P=0.07	

1. Feed adaptation was coded as 1 for no problems to 4 for major problems.

2. ** Significant at P 0.01.

P values are actual probabilities.

a,b subscripts in the same column at the same location that differ indicate significant difference.

TABLE 8: Health Performance of ACPF Calves - 1981-1983[1]

	PRECONDITIONED			PREIMMUNIZED			REGULAR		
	No. Calves	Percent Treated	Percent Died	No. Calves	Percent Treated	Percent Died	No. Calves	Percent Treated	Percent Died
Alberta[3]									
1980	236	7.6	0.0	195	17.4	0.5	1008	18.7	1.0
1981	1513	17.9	1.2	190	15.8	1.6	627	26.8	1.0
1982	2724	7.3	0.5	373	11.3	1.8	3269	15.5	2.0
1983	2033	10.4	0.5	678	12.9	1.5	2775	29.9	2.8
Average[2]		10.7	0.6		13.5	1.4		22.0	2.1
Ontario[3]									
1980	213	12.0	0.6	196	26.0	0.0	770	46.0	1.0
1981	139	11.5	0.0	104	8.7	0.0	109	20.2	0.9
1982	186	8.3	0.3	129	19.0	2.8	907	18.8	0.4
1983	436	8.5	0.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	432	25.7	0.9
Average[2]		9.6	0.2		19.7	0.8		29.6	0.7

1. - complete data from each year was used.
2. - averages weighted for number of calves.
3. - feeding location.

VI. CONCLUSION

Four years experience with and observations of preconditioning has demonstrated that cow-calf producers are able to consistently market heavier calves and obtain a price premium which combined together substantially increases their returns. While cattle feeders must pay a higher price for preconditioned calves, they obtain significantly reduced disease problems in the feedlot. Preimmunization alone tends to be somewhat intermediate between preconditioned and regular calves in most respects.

The program suffered a serious decline in numbers of calves certified by producers. Several reasons for this decline have been discussed. The most frequent reason given for the decline is the removal of the paid veterinary visits. Prior to the start of the 1984 program, serious thought should be given to the actual reasons for the decline and whether education and extension or change in administrative policy would be the best approach to overcoming the problems.

Alberta Agriculture's commitment to providing a full-time position to servicing the program ends March 31, 1984. Serious discussion should take place soon as to how the ACPF program will be administered and serviced in the future.

POOR

QUALITY

ORIGINAL